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AUTHOR Kersten, Larry; Phillips, Stephen R.
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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, e-mail (electronic mail) has been seen as an efficient communications medium for the transmission of simple, routine, unambiguous messages. More recent research has argued that the simple, efficient view of e-mail is incomplete. Future research should be extended into the strategic and symbolic functions of email, such as the use of email for impression management. Impression management has a lengthy and interesting development in the fields of sociology and social psychology, but has remained largely ignored by those in the field of communications. Communications scholars should focus on the potential use of email for impression management for three reasons: (1) the use of email influences the development, maintenance and distribution of power in organizations; (2) email has a potential impact on a worker's job satisfaction; and (3) as computer technology becomes more common, researchers should investigate the ways employees reinvent technologies to reach social goals. Data were gathered from over 1,100 messages from 25 employees at a west coast research institute affiliated with a major university. The data suggests that numerous behaviors exhibited by email users can be related to impression management, and provide examples of goals, illustrations of impression management (ingratiation, self-promotion, intimidation, exemplification, and supplication), and examples of four types of ceremony (personalization, keeping in touch, salutations and conclusions, and meta-messages). A methodology for the study of the ways email is used for impression management could be based on the strategy of triangulation of methods, which involves a series of dialogues. (Thirty-seven references are attached.) (HB)

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Electronic Identities: The Strategic Use of Email for Impression Managment.

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Larry Kersten

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

By

Larry Kersten

Department of Communication Arts and Science

Grace Ford Salvatori Hall, 344

University of Southern California

Los Angeles, CA 90089-1694

(213) 740-3939

and

Dr. Stephen R. Phillips

Department of Interpersonal Communication

University of Montana

Missoula, MT 59801

(406) 721-6582

CS507868

Running Head: Email and Impression Managment

Abstract

Traditionally, email has be seen as an efficient communication medium. Its primary use has been for the transmission of simple, routine, unambiguous messages. More recent research has argued that the simple, efficient view of email is incomplete. Instead, it is has begun to explore the strategic and symbolic dimensions of email. This purpose of this paper is to provide a rationale for extending future research into the strategic and symbolic functions of email by suggesting ways in which email may be used for impression management. The paper begins by tracing the development of impression managment in sociology and social psychology, and suggests that communication scholars should focus on impression managment goals, strategies, and ceremonies. Then, we provide examples of each of these and suggest a methodology for studying the ways email is used for impression management

Since the late 1970's there has been an increasing interest in research and theory in the field of electronic mail (email) or computer assisted communication. Researchers have studied computer conferencing (Rice, 1984), email in organizations (Schmitz, 1988), and computer bulletin boards (Steinfield, 1983), just to name a few areas.

The majority of the early literature portrayed email (and other forms of computer assisted communication) from a rather functional, efficient view. For example, Daft & Lengel's media or information richness theory (1984; 1986) suggested that email would be used predominantly for simple, efficiency-related, mundane purposes. The typical rationale for this line of thinking is that as the "bandwidth" of a medium (i.e. the number of cues it is able to transmit) narrows, the less capable and/or suitable it is for sending highly personal, sensitive, or ambiguous messages (Fulk, Steinfield, Schmitz, & Power, 1987; Hiemstra, 1982; Markus, 1988; Rice & Love, 1987)

Schmitz (1988) summarizes:

> The sustaining proposition of [the body of research examining email in organizations] is that while electronic media are efficient for simple tasks, they are not very well suited for complex communication situations, personal topics or high levels of task ambiguity. The use of electronic media are presumed to result from considerations of efficiency in completing relatively simple communication tasks (p. 6).

However, beginning with Trevino, Lengel, and Daft's (1987) article on the "symbolic" functions of media choice and usage, there has been an increasing focus on the functions of email that may not be directly attributable to its efficiency. For example, Trevino, et al. (1987) note that managers often utilize formal, written communication instead of face-to-face interaction to "symbolize" their authority. Similarly, Markus (1988) suggests that email users may choose email because of its peculiar features (e.g., its "plasticity" or ability to be preserved) and because of the cues the media fails to transmit (e.g., some email users may not want people to see their faces or hear their voices when sending certain messages). Extending this line of thinking, Phillips (1989) argued that email is explicitly used to gain the compliance of others. He found, among other things, that

carbon copying (CCing) was utilized by email users to apply pressure on recipients of messages, and thereby increase the probability of their complying with a request.

Although Phillips (1989) does not develop the point, he also suggests that email participants may utilized email for impression management, that is, strategically utilizing email to create a desirable social identity. This view suggests a significantly different role for email than the simple, efficient, usage originally posited by media richness theory. Instead, this symbolic or persuasive view argues that email has a significant role in the dynamic interpersonal and political processes inherent in organizations (Morgan, 1986).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a rationale for extending future research into the strategic uses of email. Specifically, we hope to provide direction for research into the utilization of email for impression management. We begin with an extended discussion of impression management by tracing the way it has been formulated in sociology and social psychology. Drawing on these disciplines, we then identify three levels of analysis that communication research needs to address to develop an adequate understanding of the relationship between impression management and email usage. Next, three reasons are presented which explain why we believe this approach to email is important, followed by numerous examples of email messages that may be instances of impression management. Finally, we suggest a qualitative methodology for investigating the relationship between impression management and email utilizations.

Impression Management: Sociology, Psychology, and Communication

One of the first systematic treatments of impression management in contemporary era was Goffman's (1959) classic, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Being a sociologist, Goffman emphasized the collaborative and ceremonial dimensions of impression management rather than the intrapsychic motivations of individual actors. He saw impression management as the means of developing a "working consensus" about of the definition of a situation. When an individual adopts a particular dramatic persona he projects an implied definition of the situation onto his audience. If the members of the audience accept the persona of the actor, they are concurrently "put into a situation" in which they must treat the actor according to the persona he has claimed. If, on the other

hand, the audience rejects the situation the actor attempts to assume, they also deny him access to the desired persona. Along this line, it is important to understand that for Goffman, impression management was less a matter of creating a social identity as much as it was assuming an identity which was socially constructed and potentially available to an individual in a given situation. This idea was succinctly stated in the following:

> In analyzing the self then we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside in the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments (Goffman, 1959, p. 253, emphasis added).

The situation plays a central role in Goffman's analysis of impression management because it both guides and gives meaning to human interaction. A situation consists of network of temporally salient "rules of conduct." These rules suggest the "suitable or just" course of action for a person to follow, and therefore have a "moral" or "obligatory" dimension to them. They also "transform action and inaction into expression, [so that] . . . when an individual becomes involved in the maintenance of a rule, he tends also to become committed to a particular image of self" (Goffman, 1967, p. 50, emphasis added). Impression management, then, is a matter of selecting and following a set of potentially available rules of conduct .

Goffman subdivided rules of conduct into substantive rules and ceremonial rules[1]. A substantive rule is one "which guides conduct in regard to matters felt to have significance in their own right, apart from what the infraction or maintenance of the rule expresses about the selves of the persons involved" (Goffman, 1967, p. 53). An example of a substantive rule governing email usage might be for an employee to send a message to his supervisor to let her know what time he begins his lunch hour. This behavior is significant because it lets the supervisor know when she can expect the employee to return, not because it says something important about the employee's character. A ceremonial rule, on the other hand, is one "which guides conduct in matters felt to have secondary or even no significance in their own right, having their primary importance--officially anyway--as a conventionalized means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys

his appreciation of the other participants in the situation" (Goffman, 1967, p. 54). Ceremonial rules guide the manner in which substantive rules are followed or broken. As such, they govern variables such as media choice, vocabulary, content, message length, response latencies, the time a message is sent, the number of people addressed, and any other medium or message related variable that acquires a "symbolic" value in an organization (Trevino, et al, 1987). For example, consider the following ways in which the substantive rule mentioned above may be followed:

(1) 12:15–lunch

(2) It's 12:15! I'm starving! I'm leaving! C-ya later [:-)

(3) I'm almost done with that project. I should be back from lunch a little after 1:00, so I should have it on your desk by about 2:30.

Though each of these messages serves the purpose of letting the supervisor know what time the employee should return to work, the second message is obviously more "playful" than the others, and the third message communicates greater responsibility.

It is important to realize that Goffman's distinction between substantive and ceremonial rules is analytical rather than empirical. Consequently, "all activity that is primarily substantive in significance will nevertheless carry some ceremonial meaning, provided that its performance is perceived in some way by others" (Goffman, 1967, p. 56). Applying this thought to the traditional view of email we would say that even simple, efficient, routine messages have a strategic or symbolic component to them.

In contrast to Goffman, social psychologists have tended to emphasize the motivations or goals of individual actors. For instance, Tedeschi and Riess (1981) defined impression management as "any behavior by a person that has the purpose of controlling or manipulating the attributions and impressions formed of that person by others" (p. 3, emphasis added; see also Arkin & Shepperd, 1990; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Jones & Wortman, 1974; Tedeschi, 1990). The actual impressions created in the minds of the audience members are less important than the goal(s) which gave rise to the behavior. Consequently, research carried on within the social psychological community has typically taken the form of arousing "particular impression-management motives experimentally,

and . . . [observing] the features that distinguish ensuing responses from behavior without such implanted motivation" (Jones & Pittman, 1982, p. 233).

As research on impression management has developed within social psychology, two broad categories of communication strategies have emerged: direct strategies and indirect strategies (Arkin & Shepperd, 1990; Cialdini, Finch, & De Nicholas, 1990; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Direct strategies are those in which an individual behaves in such a way as to make a direct claim about the self. The claim can be explicit or implicit; verbal or nonverbal. An example of a direct impression management strategy is doing a favor for someone. The way the act is interpreted has a direct influence on the target's impression of the actor. Indirect impression management strategies, by comparison, manipulate actor's salient associations, and only indirectly indicate something about the actor. Boasting about one's university, for instance, indirectly says something about the actor as one who is associated with the university. In what follows we will provide a brief description of five direct communication strategies and three indirect strategies.

Jones and Pittman (1982) developed a taxonomy in which they identified five common impression management goals and the typical strategies used to reach them. Though they did not distinguish between direct and indirect strategies, most of the research they reviewed dealt with direct strategies. Therefore, we present the Jones and Pittman typology as examples of direct impression management strategies, and then turn to the work of Cialdini and his associates for their research on indirect strategies.

The Jones and Pittman (1982) typology is summarized as follows:

Goal: To be seen as . . .	Strategy
Likeable	Ingratiation
Dangerous	Intimidation
Competent	Self-promotion
Morally Praiseworthy	Exemplification
Helpless	Supplication

The goal of the ingratiator is to be seen as likeable. The most common ingratiation tactics are offering compliments, conforming one's opinion, doing favors, and making desirable claims about the self (Jones & Wortman, 1974). More subtle forms of ingratiation include showing interest in the other person by asking personal questions, and surrendering the floor to one's conversational partner (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986). Most of these tactics can easily be employed in a text-based medium like email.

To be seen as dangerous, the intimidator must convince the target that he is both willing and able to harm the target. This harm does not need to be physical, it can also be social and/or psychological. Typical tactics include "blackmailing" a target by threatening to shame, embarrass, or discredit him if some condition is not met.

According to Jones (1990) the attribution of competence is most closely associated with a person's perceived level of natural ability. The "lay" formula used to assess one's degree of competence is:

Competence = Natural Ability + Motivation + Effort

Self-promotion tactics, therefore, usually consist of disclosures about one's accomplishments, and information about the level of motivation and/or effort it took to achieve them (Godfrey, et al, 1986; Jones, 1990). Using this formula it can be seen that if a person's accomplishment is already known, a successful self-promotion tactic might include disclosing the obstacles that were overcome, and/or down-playing one's effort. In both cases the person's level of natural ability is indirectly enhanced, thereby increasing her perceived competence.

To earn the praise of others the exemplifier must perform behaviors that express the deepest and most "sacred" values of the community. The performance must be uncommon to serve as an example to others, yet consistent enough to actually typify the exemplifier. This could include enduring greater hardship than others (e.g. working evenings and weekends) and/or scrupulously performing common tasks with perfection (e.g. keeping one's expense account). If the exemplifier's performance is inconsistent, she risks being labelled a hypocrite or self-righteous egoist (Gilbert & Jones, 1986).

Finally, the supplicator elicits pity from others by showing himself to be weak or helpless. Supplication tactics include accounting for failures by portraying oneself as a powerless victim of circumstance, discussing one's problems, and/or revealing one's inadequacies.

Cialdini and his associates have identified three indirect impression management tactics: Basking in reflected glory, blasting the opposition, and boosting one's associations. Basking in reflected glory occurs when an individual either establishes a positive association, or reaffirms an already established positive association between the self and a highly esteemed other, institution, or cultural icon (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989; Cialdini, Finch, & De Nicholas, 1990; Richardson & Cialdini, 1981). Examples include name dropping, advocating company policies, and disclosing one's social or professional affiliations. Blasting the opposition involves derogating one's rival (Richardson & Cialdini, 1981). In so doing, the impression manager indirectly casts a positive light on himself. Common examples of "blasting" might include putting down another person and/or his ideas and condemning institutional practices. The last tactic, "boosting," occurs when a person augments or enhances someone or something with which she is already associated (Finch & Cialdini, 1989). Perhaps the most typical boosting strategy is when parents boast about their children's accomplishments.

For scholars interested in organizational communication, we believe it is wise to draw upon the insights generated by sociologists and social psychologists alike. The literature on impression management just reviewed suggests three fruitful directions for research into the strategic use of email. First, communication scholars need to investigate the relationship between email users' goals and actual email utilization. Managing one's identity is a fundamental feature of social life (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Tedeschi, 1990). Therefore, it is important to understand how various communication media enable and constrain one's ability to achieve such goals. Second, attention should be paid to the tactics already identified that are used in face-to-face interaction. Many impression management tactics are verbal; therefore, they should be readily applicable in a text-based medium such as email. Finally, communication scholars should attempt to identify the ceremonial aspects of email usage. This would include searching for patterns of email usage that differentiate users, groups, and organizations from one another.

The Significance of Studying the Use of Email for Impression Management

Given this introduction to impression management, we believe the potential use of email for impression management warrants the attention of researchers interested in organizational communication for at least three reasons. First, the utilization of email for impression management influences the development, maintenance, and distribution of power in an organization. The introduction of an email system transforms organizational structuring by changing the communication networks (Monge & Eisenberg, 1987) Email users not only engage in more vertical communication, but also tend to communicate with greater numbers of people on the same level of the organizational hierarchy (Culnan & Markus, 1987; Kaye & Byrne, 1986; Sproull & Keisler, 1986). This increased connectivity produces a flattening of the organizational hierarchy along with an emergence of new communication networks (Culnan & Markus, 1987; Monge & Eisenberg, 1987; Sproull & Keisler, 1986; Rice, 1987). Obviously, network emergence is at least partially a function of the impression management skills of the email user. For example, an employee who does not respond to her email messages in a timely manner may perceived as "lazy" or "irresponsible," and therefore cease to receive messages. In this case she would no longer be a member of the network., which, in turn, would likely result in a substantial loss of influence.

The second reason why the the potential use of email for impression management is its potential impact on an individual's job satisfaction. Those who are able to generate impressions of being likeable, competent, intelligent, and trustworthy are likely to experience greater job satisfaction than those who are disliked and disrespected (Locke, 1976). Additionally, there is some evidence that participating in email networks influences a users perception of his own importance. Sproull and Kiesler (1986) report that email users become preoccupied with their own email activity, and tend to overestimate the number of messages they send and receive on the system. This biased estimate occurs when an email user overestimates his significance in the network. Though he may not find the tasks associated with his job any more satisfying, an inflated sense of significance will likely lead to greater satisfaction with the relational environment of his work (Tedeschi, 1990).

Finally, as computer mediated communication becomes more common, it is incumbent upon researchers to investigate the ways in which employees adapt to or "reinvent" (Rogers, 1983) the

technologies to reach their social goals. Though email was originally described as an efficient tool, Markus (1988) notes that some individuals use it to avoid conflict with intimidating others. Understanding this type of transformation in the perceived attributes of a communication medium helps us understand its symbolic and strategic roles in the ongoing development of the organization.

Impression Management Functions in Email

In this section we discuss several behaviors exhibited by email users which we feel are related to impression management. Following up on the three directions for research mentioned above, we begin with a brief discussion of goals, provide illustrations of different impression management strategies when possible, and attempt to identify a variety of ceremonial rules implicated in the data. Before proceeding, however, a brief mention of the source of the illustrative data is warranted.

Source of Illustrative Data

Data gathered by Phillips (1989) in his study of a West Coast research institute affiliated with a major West Coast university will be utilized for our illustrative purposes.

Phillips (1989) collected over 1,100 messages from 25 employees at the research institute (hereafter referred to as CRI--a pseudonym). The messages were collected over approximately a three month period. Phillips also conducted over 35 in-depth interviews concerning email usage with employees both at CRI and at three supplemental organization-- a university computing center, a city government, and a Federal government institution .

Goals

Though our data was not collected with a view toward understanding the impression management motivations of the email users, we believe a few comments are in order. Impression management is a goal oriented activity and, therefore, understanding the goals of email users is vitally important to understanding the phenomena. But it is important to realize that the most sophisticated impression managers may be the least aware of their own impression management

goals. This true for three reasons: First, the more skilled we become at an activity the less conscious monitoring it takes to perform (Shotter, 1982). We learn very quickly as we are growing up that the way others see us has a profound impact on the way they respond to us. Consequently, from a very early age begin to practice the art of impression management, and by the time we reach adulthood most of us have developed a sophisticated repertoire of impression management skills that rarely require conscious monitoring. Second, we often pursue multiple goals simultaneously. In the same way I can simultaneously pursue the goals "drive home" and "plan my vacation," email users can concurrently manage their impressions and complete other tasks associated with their job. Finally, many goals are hierarchically arranged, and impression management goals may be "nested" or implicated in higher order goals (Dillard, 1990; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). For example, the goal of "doing a good job" often implies "so I'll be seen as competent."

A quote from an email user at CRI seems to indicate that he is motivated to create a positive image in the eyes of his supervisor, yet he does not identify his behavior as an impression management motivation:

> I can let [my boss] know what I'm doing by contacting somebody and letting [my boss] know what I'm requesting. In a way that's [my boss'] way of keeping track of what I'm up to and what another employee is up to as far as my supervision. . . . It lets [my boss] know that I'm still doing my job [as well letting] someone else know what to do.

Since employees may be unaware of their impression management goals, it is important that researchers explore the various ways in which email users rationalize their action (Giddens, 1984).

Strategies

In this section we will provide illustrative data which seems to correspond with the direct impression management strategies identified in the Jones & Pittman typology discussed above.

Ingratiation--The goal the ingratiator is to be seen as likeable. The ingratiation tactics used in the data we examined included accommodating/doing favors, complimenting, expression of warmth, and politeness.

1. Accommodating tactics are designed to be helpful. They take a submissive role and display deference to the target. Note the following examples:

   "If I can do anything else to help, let me know OK?"

   "Let me know if this is OK with you. If it's not I'll try and change it."

2. Complimenting tactics cast the target in a positive light. For instance:

   "I must say you did a lovely job of presenting these points in a positive and constructive way." and

   Jim,

   ATTA WAY BABY!

   Thanks VERY much.

3. Expressions of warmth tactics indicated esteem or positive regard for the target. Consider the following two examples:

   "I hope our lunch chat was useful to you. I don't envy you, with the choices you need to make. Good luck sorting things out in your own mind. I wish you peace with your decision, whatever the decision is."

   "That's good. Now no one can blame you if they get sick! I'm really sorry to hear that your caught is still so bad. You really deserve a break! Do you need anything? Let me know. I hope I see you tomorrow and that you're feeling better."

4. Politeness tactics included the incorporation of simple expressions like "please," and "Have a nice vacation."

Self-promotion--The goal of the self-promoter is to be seen as competent. This is generally done by either providing a target with information about an ability or accomplishment, or avoiding information about inabilities and failures. We noticed three behaviors we believe serve a self-promotion goal. They are CCing your own boss, CCing unnecessary other, and being exact or precise.

CCing your own boss--One of the common features noted by Phillips (1989) of the email users he studied was their use of the carbon copy. Similar to paper memo, CCs indicate that a copy of the message was sent to someone other than the primary recipient.

Due to the ease with which an email user may CC someone other than the primary recipient of their message, it becomes clear that who you carbon copy may become very strategic. For example, if an employee routinely CCs their boss on all of their task-related email messages we may begin to feel that this employee is wanting to make sure their boss knows they are doing their job, doing a good job, etc. Obviously, a supervisor may request that her subordinates CC them on all task-related message. However, if the subordinate voluntarily CCs her boss on most messages, we believe she is attempting to establish or maintain an impression of competence.

A message from an employee at CRI to another employee (of fairly high status in another division) provides an example of CCing your boss (see Figure 1). Extraneous information in the header field (e.g., message identification number and local computer host information) has been deleted for ease of readability. Also, all names or references to specific organizations or groups have been changed.

To: Jenkins
CC: JBlake, NWaters, JJones, KHastings
Subject: July [Numbers for Jenkins' Division]
Date: Fri, 12 Aug 88 13:59:30 PST
From: Karen Hastings <KHastings

Bob,

I'm hoping to have your July numbers to you on Monday (8/15). We want to start this fiscal year off on the right foot so it's taking us a little extra time to refine some old procedures.

Jill talked to Frank at SCI and was informed that our JV deadline is August 23 at noon. Frank didn't seem very sure about this date, so we'll double check early next week.

I do apologize for this delay. I will do my best to get everything to you as soon as possible.

Karen

Figure 1

The role of impression management in this message becomes clear with a little explanation. As mentioned above, Bob Jenkins is a fairly high ranking official in one of five research divisions--he was acting director of that division at the time of the message. Kathy Hastings is giving Bob information about when important fiscal information will be ready along with an apology for a delay in the report. Note that Kathy has CCd NWaters (her immediate superior) as well as JBlake (NWaters' superior). Note also that Kathy has listed JBlake before NWaters in the "CC:" field, and then finally CCd herself (i.e., sent a copy of her own message to herself).

By sending this message to Bob and CCing her two immediate superiors, Kathy appears to be reinforcing the image of a competent, conscientious employee. Additionally, listing the CC recipients in order from the highest to the lowest ranking represents an awareness of the relative status of each recipient, and consequently reinforces the social structure which differentiates their status

Another employee indicated that CCing his boss simultaneously facilitated impression management as well as instrumental task goals. Of particular interest in this example is the way the employee uses email to place the responsibility for the activity in the hands of his superiors. This not only allows for immediate feedback if he has misunderstood the assigned task, but is also insures against future reproach if the task is completed incorrectly:

> The main reason I use [email] is so that I have a record. If I get [a request from my boss or my boss' boss that] says, "Don't forget to do this," I will send a message to the person who's going to do it asking them to make sure that so and so happens. And that gives me a record that for sure I did it. And then I'll copy [my boss or my boss' boss] so that they know that it's moving on its way. Also, if I've misinterpreted exactly what they wanted, they have an opportunity to say, "No, that's not exactly what I wanted," before the person goes through some whole big bunch of work to get a report that doesn't have anything to do with what they wanted.

<u>CCing unnecessary others</u>--In addition to CCing one's boss, it is common to CC employees other than the primary recipient of the message. While some email users CC more than others, and while some (or even most) of the CCs are probably necessary, it is still likely that many CCs are unnecessary. Distributing information to those who do not need it may be a way of symbolizing

one's status as one who is "in the know." Though we are unable to determine the necessity of the CCing that was among our data, it is reasonable to assume that some of these unnecessary CCs are directly attributable to a desire for impression management.

Being Exact/Precise--Email is a written medium that is easily preserved. If you send a message via email it will be delivered in the form of text. Furthermore, a message may be preserved by either filing it away electronically, or printing a "hard copy" to be filed. Due to the ease of preservation coupled with the textual format, the appropriate level of precision in spelling and grammar become salient. While email messages between friends may be replete with misspelled words and/or grammatical errors, it is less likely that a message sent to a colleague, superior, or subordinate in an organization would contain such mistakes.

Although most users find email much more conversational than a letter or memo, it is difficult to forget that the person on the receiving end is judging your grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, and will have the ability to save the message for future reference. In essence, since email provides an easy means of preserving one's compositional inadequacies it creates an added demand for precision.

The significance of grammatical precision was noted by one CRI employee who commented the difference between using email and talking on the phone. The employee explained there was

> A [big] difference between telephone usage and email usage. . . . Obviously, it becomes crucial sending out an email message--how you can write a sentence correctly in English and can you spell? Because it's real clear. And you don't always have to speak properly on the phone to give a good impression, but if [its in] email you must be able to write and spell [that] sort of minimal American Standard English. And it shows up. . . . It shows [snaps fingers] that fast.

The best illustrative evidence for the "strategy"of exactness is that of the over 1,100 messages collected by Phillips (1989), the grammatical and spelling errors are noticeable only by their absence. Though a formal content analysis of the "error rate" was not done, one is easily impressed with the exactness and precision of most all of the messages.

Intimidation--The intimidator uses threats and other coercive tactics to be seen as dangerous. Though we did not collect any threatening email messages, the following message suggests email is a potential medium to send intimidating messages. This message was simultaneously sent by a manager to eleven of her subordinates. Notice her sensitivity to the potential threat implied in the message:

> I would like to meet with all of you very briefly (I hope not more than 1/2 hour) at 9am in my office. If you have some deadline which needs to be met, I will understand. If there's any way at all to squeeze this time in, though, I would very much appreciate it if you could be at the meeting.
>
> NO ONE IS IN TROUBLE!!!. . . .
>
> Thanks,

Exemplification--The exemplifier goes out of her way to engage in acts which express the deepest values of the organization. Though it is possible that many of the messages collected manifested exemplary behavior, we were only able to identify one case that could be seen as an exemplification tactic. This consisted of sending late night and early morning messages. One of the email users sent four messages late one night. The times the messages were sent were (recorded in military time): 23:38, 23:46, 23:55, and 00:14 of the next day. Assuming this is uncommon, working at midnight represents a commitment to the organization that most probably do not share.

Supplication--A supplicating strategy is designed to elicit pity from the target by projecting oneself as a helpless victim. Though these messages were expectedly rare, notice the following three messages sent by the same person. She, more than everyone else combined, seemed to play the role of the supplicant:

1. Sorry I didn't get back to you. I came into work Thurs, discovered I was sick, stayed to get crucial things done and stumbled out at noon. I was out sick Fri and am in today, sort of.

2. AAARRRRRRGH!

   I'M CERTAINLY GLAD MY WEEKEND WAS RESTFUL AND NOT NEARLY AS EVENTFUL AS THIS MORNING HAS BEEN!!!!!!!!!

3. Well shoot, if I'm still this angry and cranky at life in generally, I must be well enough to swim. I don't have my stuff with me, but can go home after work and get it.

   No more swimming for me. Twice now I've exercised in the morning and both times a couple of days later got sick. Sorry about that, Kathy.

   general grumble grumble snarl

   --N

Thus far, it seems quite obvious that many email message can be classified as illustrations of impression management strategies. We were unable to discern any indirect impression management strategies, but this is probably not because they were not used, but because we are unfamiliar with the hierarchy of values and salient associations among the employees.

Ceremony

The ceremonial rules which guide the communication patterns of email users indicate the character of the sender. It is in the ceremony rules of an organization that media use acquires its symbolic function. In this section we will give examples of four types of ceremony: Personalization, keeping in touch, salutations and conclusions, and meta-messages. Obviously, many more types ceremony could be identified, but in the interest of space we will limit our discussion to these four.

Personalization

Personalization refers to the consistent adoption and expression of a particular dramatic persona. Almost all email users have occasions when they send a joke, get serious, banter about sports and politics, and discuss their weekend plans, but some email users consistently seem to script a more coherent image. The examples given below were from an employee who consistently sent messages indicating he was playing or joking about something. He seemed to be the corporate jester. In the first example notice the slang expressions and spelling:

From: MS

Subject: Surprise

say brother, howzabout you and me splitting the paper goods AND the sodas??? OR, if we get bruce in on the party the three of us can split paper goods AND sodas and it'll come out quite cheap. can u dig it?

-mx

Naturally, this type of playful banter is suited to planning a party. But notice the same communication pattern in the following two task related messages:

From: MS

Subject: COMPUTER STUFF FOR THE LAST TIME

can you send me that info on the terminal stand? i guess i deleted it by axydent. thanx again. . .

YOU. . . ASKED FOR IT! YOU GOT IT

From: MS

Subject: DATED STUFF

0) The early bird catches the worm

1) Yes, it's NOT that time of year again, yet. However, in few months or so it will be. I'm talking New Year. I'm talking New Calendars. I'm talking dated stuff.

2) Every one of you works for someone who (thinks he/she) is so important that they need nest year's calendar YESTERDAY! Order theirs now otherwise around Oct./Nov. they will be screaming. . . .

6) Can YOU look at a chartreuse monthly minder for 52 weeks straight???. . . .

So now that you understand the *urgenity of this situation I can humbly remind you all that. . .

IT'S YOUR RESPONSE-ABILITY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR PEOPLE WANT and then report that info back to me. If someone come up to me in January

asking about dated stuff I'm going to have to tell him/her "HA HA HA HA HA...Here, have a chartreuse Monthly Minder. . . on the house. . . . .

-M

* a new word

As can be seen from these messages, this employee is able to strategically use email to consistently express a coherent social identity. Though his messages represent an extreme, a more complete analysis would most likely disclose more sophisticated ceremonies.

Keeping In Touch

Keeping in touch ceremonies are simple messages that playfully acknowledge some dimension of the relationship between the sender and recipient. The following three messages illustrate:

Subject: Happy Birthday

To: Loretta

**********WISHING YOU MANY MORE**********

To: CS

Subject: Finally got your orange folders

!!!

which the message, and therefore the sender, should be understood. We found examples of four types of salutations and three types of conclusions. They are as follows:

a. *Playful salutation*--Playful salutations include novel ways of introducing the message. Examples of playful salutations are, "Guess who?,"Oops, Sorry Vicky.," and "Teddy Bear."

b. *Friendly salutation*--Friendly salutations offer a friendly greeting to the addressee. For example, "Hi" along with the person's name, or simply the word "Hi."

c. *Professional salutation*--Professional salutations simply begin with the addressee's name e.g. "Linda"

d. *Omitted salutation*--These messages have no salutation, but simply begin with the text of the message. In the data we examined these messages were predominantly generated by the executive director.

Similar to the salutations, conclusions provide information about the emotional tone of the message. We noticed three types of conclusions:

a. *Playful conclusions*--Playful conclusions are characterized by nicknames and non-normative endings e.g. "Fishie," "I miss you!!!!!," and "Bye Bye"

b. *Friendly conclusions*--Friendly conclusions conclude a message with "Thanks" or "Thanks a lot" prior to designating the name. In our data, friendly conclusions were almost always used when the message sender was asking a favor of the addressee.

c. *Professional conclusions*--Professional conclusions end the message by simply stating the name of the sender e.g. "Ginny"

Meta-messages

Finally, our last category, meta-messages, were one of the most interesting. Meta-messages provide cues as to how a message should be interpreted. We noticed both verbal and nonverbal meta-messages.

a. Verbal meta-messages were brief phrases that let the addressee know how the message should be taken e.g. "Just kidding," or "Ha Ha."

b. Nonverbal meta-messages consisted primarily of punctuation marks and the use of capitalization. For example:

Hi Strand Lady,

_____ ____ from UCLA called and said he had spoken to you yesterday afternoon. . . . He sounded so CUTE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! WHO IS HE?????????

FISHIE

Research Strategies for Exploring Impressing Management in Email

We believe we have only touched the tip of the iceberg on the importance of understanding the relationship between email and impression management. The data employed here were simply illustrative and suggestive, but we feel a much richer understanding of email can be gained from further exploring this intriguing relationship. In fact, we argue that until researchers fully take into account the impression management functions within email, we will be relegated to an incomplete picture of email usage. Toward that end this final section is devoted to a discussion of those strategies researcher can employ in to further investigate the relationship between email and impression management.

As indicated earlier, one dimension impression management is a primarily motivational and consequently cannot simply be observed. Since impression management goals are most often instrumental to other goals, it is likely that actors will be differentially aware of their impression management strategies depending upon the significance of the other goals they are pursuing. If they believe their "image" is sufficiently in tact to accomplish their goal, and if they believe they have the requisite skills to accomplish their goals, their impression management behaviors will merely consist of employing previously successful behavioral routines. If on the other hand, they are insecure about their abilities, they will likely be very aware of the impressions they are generating. Given this viewpoint, we must rely on a research strategy which acknowledges the benefits and limitations of several different research methodologies.

We propose a research strategy of triangulation of methods which involves a series of dialogues. While each of these dialogues provides only a portion of the overall picture, each step will hopefully move a researcher closer to a more accurate portrayal of the enacted social drama.

The first dialogue is between the researcher an the email users. These interviews are intended to be semi-structured, allowing for new avenues of exploration to emerge. This first dialogue also helps the researcher understand the context within which s/he is working.

The second dialogue is between the researcher and a collected set email messages. Having gained a greater sense of direction from the first dialogue with email users, the researcher now is more in tune with what to look for in the "textual" data of the messages themselves. This particular step is a dialogue in the sense that the researcher allows the data to "speak for itself," while at the same time the researcher has obviously brought a conceptual framework to the dialogue in directing his/her attention. This dialogue is similar to the steps developed in a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987).

The third dialogue is again between the researcher and email users. Optimally, this dialogue will be between the researcher and email users whose messages the researcher examined in the previous dialogue. The purpose of this third dialogue is to openly discuss the researcher's tentative findings and conclusions based upon the first two dialogues. For example, a researcher may note that a certain user employed an inordinate amount of CCs, leading the researcher to believe that the employee may be attempting to manage the impression others have of them. The employee may, of course, respond negatively or positively, the important point is that the researcher is able to again get the email user's side of the story.

The fourth dialogue is again between the researcher an the data. This time however, the researcher must fuse the "harder" data from the content analysis, questionnaire, or observation with the "softer" data of the email users' perceptions of their own actions and/or their perceptions of the actions of others. At this point the researcher is forced to weigh the evidence and determine whether or not impression management in this particular situation was conscious or unconscious. Furthermore, the researcher must assess whether or not the participants could have accurately judged their own

behavior and whether or not the participants would have truthfully shared the information with the researcher even if they could have.

The fifth and final dialogue is, of course, the dialogue between the researcher and the academic community at large. At this point the researcher must make a case for the link between impression management and the observed email behaviors. The important question at this stage is whether or not the researcher has argued his/her point well.

Though we realize this research strategy is only a brief sketch of the activity involved in qualitative analysis, we expect interested researchers will fill in the missing parts. What we believe to be most important is the interaction between researcher, data, and email user. We believe that using this combination of research methods will yield richer insights into the ways in which individuals use email.

Note [1] Goffman's treatment of substantive and ceremonial rules is similar to the "report" and "command" functions of messages respectively, as delineated by Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967).

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